

The Ballarat Naturalist

August 2014



Wet & Windy: Life on Sub-Antarctic Islands

Speaker: Carol Hall, Geographer & Club Member

Located on or near the Antarctic Convergence where cold polar waters meet warmer seas, the sub-antarctic islands of New Zealand and Australia's Macquarie Island span seven degrees of latitude from 47°S to 54°S. Surrounded by water, annual average temperatures vary by only 4° to 5° from winter to summer, while rainfall is distributed evenly throughout the year - around 1000mm on Macquarie Island. Strong to gale force winds can be expected on 20-25 days of each month and direct sunshine for only 1-3.5 hours per day! Cloudiness and steady drizzle are par for the course. On our Dec. visit, daily temperatures hovered around 6°-10°C – that's without wind chill!



Photo: King Penguin

The Snares (named because historically so many ships were caught on the rocks), Auckland Island and Campbell Island belong to New Zealand. With Macquarie Island, they were the sites of whaling and sealing stations, while penguins were also harvested on Macquarie Is. Pigs and goats were deliberately left on the NZ islands so that shipwrecked mariners wouldn't starve, while rats and mice went ashore from the ships. Cattle

were farmed on Campbell Island until the 1980s.

Tourist landings and numbers are strictly controlled at all islands; none are allowed at The Snares (half a day's steaming south of Stewart Island) where thick layers of peat cover the granite base of the islands and the burrows of great numbers of Sooty Shearwaters riddle the ground. Only scientists with permits are allowed. Here breeds the endemic Snares Penguin, one of seven species of crested penguin.

The Auckland Island group is volcanic, and layers of ash and basalt

are exposed in the cliffs. Tourists are permitted on the most northeasterly island, Enderby Island where a boardwalk guides visitors from dwarf rata forest through gardens of megaherbs and tussocks of *Poa* to the breeding areas of the Southern Royal Albatross and the rugged cliffs where the Light-mantled Sooty Albatross can be found. On the beach, bull Hooker's Sea Lions staked out territory as they waited for the females to come ashore, while immature sea lions engaged in play-fighting on the grass further inland. The endemic Auckland Is. Pipit and Tomtit came to investigate us. And it rained for most of our time on the island, and blew hard on the exposed ridges. The S.R. Albatrosses snuggled down amongst the tussocks as they incubated their single egg.

Campbell Island also has volcanic origins, and basalt columns are exposed along the cliffs and on mountain sides. Anchored in Perseverance Harbour we enjoyed two nights of flat calm water and the opportunity to eat well after being tossed around in the open ocean between here and Macquarie Island! Two flightless birds are endemic to Campbell Island, the Teal and the Shag; no predators threaten them. At the north end of the island is the sole breeding area of the Campbell Albatross which we saw flying over our ship, and another boardwalk allowed us to visit more S.R. Albatross breeding sites – we sat 5m away from the incubating bird, each inspecting the other! More megaherbs were seen, in particular the Campbell Island Carrot *Anistome latifolia*, Ross Lily *Bulbinella rossii* and Macquarie Island Cabbage *Stilbocarpa polaris*. And it continued to drizzle...

Our visit to Macquarie Island (1500km south of Hobart) was the highlight: not only did we experience a rare sunny calm day (at least



Photo: Elephant Seal pup

until mid-afternoon) but we could sit on the beach surrounded by the endemic Royal Penguins (another crested species which only breeds here) and the stately King Penguins which breed on many of the world's sub-antarctic islands. Gentoo Penguins had formed a welcoming party as we came ashore. Escorted by members of the Australian Antarctic Division we passed immature Elephant Seals lying moulting on the beach while the current pups in their silvery coats gazed wide-eyed at us.

Blue-eyed Shags sat on top of mounds of pillow-lava, and Northern Giant Petrels fended off Skuas as each tried to get a share of the Elephant Seal carcass rotting on the sand. A viewing platform had been built on top of one of the ridges of basaltic oceanic crust which makes this island unique and resulted in World Heritage status being conferred upon it. The view looked out across the isthmus on which the AAD station is built.



Photo: Royal Penguin

Further down the coast at Sandy Bay is a colony of around 10,000 Royal Penguins, and again a viewing platform enabled us to overlook the colony where many newly hatched chicks were being looked after – or if not, the Skuas flew down and snatched unguarded chicks. The Royal Penguins on the beach were totally unfazed by our presence; the Kings wandered up to us, found we were neither edible nor threatening and wandered away again.

The pest eradication program begun in 2011 and carried out using bait, calicivirus and dogs was about to end and we saw some of the dogs; this last April the program was declared successful and the dogs and handlers brought home to mainland Australia. Rabbits, rats and mice had created serious erosion, destroyed petrel nesting habitat and reduced food availability. Plants are recovering rapidly and bird breeding success is rising. The experience of New Zealand in carrying out similar work on Campbell Island had provided a template for the Australian program.

It was a privilege to go where few are permitted, to have so many photographic opportunities, and to be amongst creatures who had no reason to flee from us.

Carol Hall

Don't forget to pre-book tickets for the Aquarium!

Excursion, on Sun 6 Aug is a trip to Melbourne to visit
the Melbourne Aquarium

www.melbourneaquarium.com.au

Excursion: Eucalypts north of Ballarat 6 July

Eight field nats left Gillies Street and the numbers swelled to 13 in the low cloud and drizzle at the base of Mt Warrenheip. We set off through the wet grass to examine the Blue Gums growing on the west-facing slope. We searched for buds and gum nuts on the ground and what we picked up was confounding. Some nuts were sessile on stem (indicating *Eucalyptus globulus* ssp *bicostata* Eurabbie), buds found were attached with flattened peducles (*E globulus* ssp *psuedoglobulus* Victorian Eurabbie). Further investigation is necessary to find out if the trees have been planted.

Next stop on White Swan Rd. on the south end of Creswick Forest we found a very old, large Manna Gum *E viminalis*. The trunk was 1.7metres at breast height, the upper part was extensively branched. We speculated as to why it was not felled in the mining days. Was it too small then?

Along Codes Forest Rd. a few Southern Blue Gums *E globulus* ssp *globulus* had been planted on the edge of a pine plantation. A fallen branch from Messmate *E obliqua* allowed us to examine the wine-glass shaped gum nuts and leaves which are asymmetrical and oblique at the base.

At the edge of Shuttleworth Rd. were Broad-leaved Peppermint *E dives* with both mature and juvenile leaves wider than 2cm and up to 15 buds in clusters.



Photo : *E leucoxylon*

We arrived at Slaty Creek and enjoyed morning tea before examining the eucalypts around the picnic area. Near the creek were Manna Gums. The rounded juvenile foliage of some seedling alerted us to the presence of Candlebark *E rubida*. Mature specimens had cleaner, whiter bark compared to Manna Gums. A tree with thick, rough bark was a Scentbark *E aromaphloia* and when the bark was scratched a distinct aroma was detected. Narrow-leaved Peppermint *E radiata* was identified by its narrow leaves and peppermint smell. Further along Slaty Creek we

found Swamp Gum *E ovata* with wavy edged leaves and funnel-shaped bud caps and fruits.

North of Creswick we stopped along West Berry Rd to see a Snow Gum *E pauciflora* growing on the volcanic soil. The veins in the leaves run lengthwise. A few out of season flowers were seen on the tree; normal flowering time is early summer.

West of Clunes we looked at some roadside River Red Gum *E camaldulensis*. On the opposite side of the road were Yellow Gum *E leucoxylon*. The difference in juvenile foliage is a useful way of distinguishing these trees.



Photo: *E microcarpa*

By lunch time at Ginger Adams Eucalyptus Distillery in Dunach Nature Conservation Reserve the sun was shining for a short time. We inspected the well preserved relic from the eucalyptus distillery before looking at the trees in the surrounding Box-Ironbark Forest. Red Box *E polyanthemos* has characteristic ovate leaves; Yellow Box *E melliodora* has small narrow leaves; Long-leaved Box *E gonicalyx* are named because of the long leaves. The dark, deeply fissured bark of Red Ironbark *E tricarpa* is unmistakable.

At a stop along Fell's Gully Track we looked for Red Stringybark *E macroryncha* which usually grows along ridge lines. After consulting a plant identification expert a few days after the excursion and examining the collected gum nuts, we decided the trees were probably Brown Stringybark *E baxteri* that are common south of Ballarat. At the northern edge of the forest a Yellow Gum was surrounded by seedlings and Grey Box *E microcarpa* with small fruits were growing in a paddock.

Our last stop was on the western side of the Clunes railway station where a row of Sugar Gums *E cladocalyx* were growing on vacant land. We found the barrel-shaped gum nuts on a fallen branch. Sugar Gums occur naturally in the southern Flinders Ranges of South Australia.

Having seen 20 species of eucalypts during the day we returned to Ballarat by mid afternoon to a welcome of wet roads and showers.

Excursion leader and report writer: John Gregurke

Excerpts from Club Meeting Minutes, July 4, 2014

Attendance: 21 members welcomed by Act. Pres. F Hanrahan

Apologies: Peter & Claire Dalman, Val Hocking, John & Elaine Gregurke, John Mildren, Dulcie Brooke, Denis & Elizabeth Thurgood, Jacki Metcalf, Ken Hammond

Correspondence IN:

Emails from Environment Vic: summary of proceedings to date from the Hazelwood Mine Inquiry; call to vote for the environment in the State Elections; call to sign the petition to move beyond coal in Victoria; information about The Future Economy Group, formed by EV and eight businesses, calling for the Vic. Gov. to take action to restore our environment as a key step towards safeguarding Victoria's prosperity and providing 100,000's of jobs; appeal to lobby the Government to maintain the Renewable Energy Target; appeal for donations for EVs campaign to stop alpine cattle grazing through a Supreme Court appeal; link to a petition asking the Premier to spend the legally required 5% of money collected from water bills on river restoration and sustainable water use, rather than diverting it to other government projects.

Emails from the representatives of the broader environment network brainstorming ideas and ideals for environmental groups around Victoria to have input into DEPI's Planned Burn program and procedures following the Royal Commission's recommendation that 390,000 Ha of state-managed forest be burnt through Planned Burns in Victoria annually.

Email from John Petheram, Club member, suggesting a possible tour to be run at the SEANA Autumn Camp with the title "The Ballarat-Creswick Le Gershe Tour From Brendan Roughead, Regional Director of DEPI: letter responding to our concerns about the issuing of a permit to cull of native birds at the Ballarat Golf Club.

OUT: To Maree McGlynn, Animal Studies Trainee at Gordon TAFE: Acceptance of invitation to take a group of students for a walk around Lake Wendouree, discussing the birdlife and it's habitat- John Gregurke to be their guide.

Business Arising from Correspondence:

The SEANA Spring Portland FNC Campout Program and Reg-

istration Form - if anyone interested speak to Emily later.
“The Heather Gibbs Memorial Art Prize”: if anyone would like an electronic copy of details, speak to Emily after the meeting.
Community event to be held at Redan Wetland. John G. to speak on Ballarat wattles for 10 min., take copies of FNCB syllabus, the Club banner for display, and wattle books for sale.
We encourage members to attend event on July 20 , 10am.
“Moths of Victoria” and “Mosses of Dry Forests in south-eastern Australia” have arrived. See Emily if copy ordered.
John G. took a group of TAFE students on a tour around Lake Wendouree with Ian Ashton from Birdlife Ballarat
John Gregurke wondered if anyone was interested in forming a group to prepare a formal response on behalf of Club “Water Future of Ballarat and Region Draft Strategy” and ? It seemed interested members preferred to be involved independently.

Reports Treasurer's Report: Opening balance \$6,460.40 Income \$ 219.04 Expenses \$537.09 Closing balance: \$6,142.35

Other reports:

Exceptional Trees Register progress. Eight club members participated in the survey of exceptional River Red Gums at Lake Burrumbeet. A disappointment was that the group was unable to locate a rumoured Canoe tree. John G. to complete the nomination of the most significant remnant indigenous trees Several members attended the local launch of the short film

“Rediscovering the Country” and found it and the following discussion with a number of the film’s interviewees to be very interesting. The producers hope for strengthening community support for improved management of rural lands were. The 35 minute film is available <http://www.rediscoveringthecountry.org>

General Business

John Gregurke is going to try and upload the Club’s amended Constitution and updated Membership Form onto our website.
John G. and Fran H. are using the promotional flyer prepared for the 2010 SEANA Autumn Camp as a template for a flyer to distribute to attendees at Portland’s Spring Camp.

John Mildren will be Acting President at next Club meeting.

A new Member! With pleasure Club welcomes David Coutts.

CALENDAR 2014

August

- Fri 1 *Wildflowers of WA* -Val Hocking &
 Birds of Britain- J Mildren & J Morrish, club members
- Sun 3 Exc: *Visit to Melbourne Aquarium* (See July newsletter)
- Tues 22 Committee meeting at John Gregurke's

September

- Fri 5 *Carbon Dioxide: Plant Food or Pollutant*-Prof Tausz
 & Dr Tausz-Posch Plant physiologists, Melb. Uni, Creswick
- Sun 6 Exc: *Survey of Smythesdale block*- E Noble, Club
 member

Committee

President Peter Dalman
Vice –President..... Fran Hanrahan
Secretary Emily Noble
Treasurer..... Les Hanrahan

Claire Dalman
John Gregurke
Wayne McGuire

Val Hocking
John Mildren

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Meetings are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..

Excursions: Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

A monthly publication of the Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Inc.

Incorporation # A0014919P ABN 13 150 403 135